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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 004119

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SUBJECT: A/S FRIED MEETING WITH FRENCH OPINION LEADERS

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT, FOR REAS
ONS 1.4 B/D

¶1. (C) Summary: Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Daniel Fried met a small group of French opinion leaders June 7 to discuss next steps following France's rejection of the European constitution. A/S Fried emphasized that, although the U.S. did not have a position on the Constitution, it clearly was in favor of a strong Europe and therefore, the USG was not happy with the recent results in France and the Netherlands. Among the opinion leaders, some believed that certain foreign policy aspects of the Constitution - such as a Foreign Minister - could be implemented without having to approve the Constitution, while others believed this type of piece-meal approach was impossible in current circumstances, and that the EU would have to focus on saving what had already been implemented, such as the euro and the common market. In general, the opinion leaders were pessimistic regarding the opening of negotiations with Turkey in the fall, believed that future enlargements, to include the Balkan states, would likely be delayed, at the very least, and expressed general gloom about French (and European) politics in general. End summary.

¶2. (C) On June 7, Assistant Secretary Fried met with French opinion leaders in Paris, France. Participants included:

U.S.

A/S Fried
Charge Alex Wolff, Embassy Paris
Kathy Allegrone, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary
Renee Earle, Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs, Embassy
Paris
Peter Kujawinski, Embassy Paris (notetaker)

France

Thierry de Montbrial, Director, French Institute of International Relations
Nicole Gnesotto, Director, Institute for Security Studies
Sylvie Goulard, CERI researcher
Laurent Cohen-Tanugi, Partner, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher and Flom
Amaya Bloch-Laine - Director, German Marshall Fund of the U.S., Paris office

¶3. (C) In a lunch with French opinion leaders June 7, Assistant Secretary Fried explained that he had decided to travel to Europe following the rejection of the EU Constitution by French and Dutch voters in order to get a sense of what people were thinking and to reassure the Europeans that the U.S. wanted a strong Europe as a partner. Although the USG did not have a position on the Constitution, it clearly was in favor of partnership with a strong Europe. President Bush, said A/S Fried, did not like weak institutions or governments, and therefore, the USG was not happy with the results of the two recent referendums. Our fear, said A/S Fried, was that a weakened EU would turn inward and be more reluctant to engage with the U.S. on pressing international matters. In addition, the USG hoped that a weakened EU would not search for a scapegoat, with two possible candidates being Turkey and the U.S.

¶4. (C) Nicole Gnesotto, director of the Paris-based Institute for Security Studies, said she believed the EU would turn inward in reaction to the probable defeat of the Constitution. EU policymakers will want to spend money within the EU instead of turning to problems outside the EU borders, said Gnesotto. This is bad news for the U.S., which has now (belatedly, in her view) come to see Europe as a partner. Gnesotto believed that the priority for the EU will be saving the accomplishments of previous years: the euro, the common market, and other social and economic programs. Once those are saved, said Gnesotto, EU policymakers can again turn to strengthening Europe. Laurent Cohen-Tanugi, a partner at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher and Flom, said he believed the French rejection of the referendum was also a rejection of past enlargements, the euro and the common market. Therefore, it was of great importance to fight against the renationalization of Europe. He feared that EU countries would fight amongst themselves, with each individual member country needing to show its respective population that it defends national interests.

15. (C) Gnesotto agreed that Europeans will be tougher against each other in the aftermath of the Constitution's failure and that European solidarity was in doubt. Thierry de Montbrial, director of the Paris-based French Institute of International Relations (known by its acronym, IFRI), said that the next several months were important to muddle through and that he hoped governments would avoid swerving towards narrow national interests. He believed that a key problem was the weakness of European leaders and noted that President Chirac was currently at the lowest approval rating (26 per cent) of any French president in the Fifth Republic (since 1958).

16. (C) Montbrial speculated that, despite the rejection of the Constitution, some of the proposals, such as increasing diplomatic cooperation within the EU and the institution of a EU Foreign Minister, might still be possible via a piecemeal approach. Gnesotto and prominent researcher Sylvie Goulard disagreed, saying that any attempt to implement the Constitution through what would be perceived as a back-door method was impossible, given the current political climate within the EU.

17. (C) In general, the opinion leaders believed that Turkey's EU candidacy was in danger following the Constitution's rejection. Montbrial said he thought Chirac had committed an enormous error in pledging that all future enlargements would be the subject of referendums, in that he outsourced a core foreign policy decision to voters. Europeans still held to the idea that Turkey was not European. It was a paradox, said Montbrial, that those who so vociferously argued against inclusion in the Constitution of language referring to Europe's Christian heritage at the same time believed Turkey should not be a member because it wasn't European, i.e., Christian. Gnesotto said she thought the EU would decide not to begin negotiations with Turkey in October, despite pledges to do so. Goulard said EU populations continue to believe that Turkey is too big, too poor and too foreign to become a member of the club. A/S Fried replied that it would be a mistake to straight-line current political dilemmas or to draw strategic conclusions from them. In the 1980s, Poland's potential membership in the EU was regarded as the subject of fantasy. In the Balkans, in Ukraine and in Turkey, the prospect of EU membership, said A/S Fried, was one of the West's most durable and powerful tools to encourage democratic transitions and economic openness. Without the prospect of EU membership for Turkey and the Balkan states, the EU would be faced with the potential of great insecurity on its borders. Goulard agreed, but said that the EU would always prioritize its own internal stability even if that meant that the stability of neighboring countries might be damaged. In the current context, she believed that opening negotiations with Turkey would damage internal EU stability. The European interlocutors approached these issues in a gloomy spirit, concerned about the electorate's rejection of the core values that had animated the European Project for a generation. All agreed that France was in no condition to pick new fights with the United States ("We would look even more absurd than we do now," whispered Gnesotto to Fried.)

18. (U) A/S Fried cleared this cable.
WOLFF